

**The Commission for Historical and Architectural  
Preservation - Staff Report  
July 10, 2007**



**Landmark Designation Report  
Riverside Park  
301 E. Randall Street  
Baltimore, MD**

The Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP) has the responsibility of recommending to the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore the adoption of ordinances designating districts and landmarks within the limits of the City of Baltimore, having special historical, architectural, educational, cultural, social or community significance, interest, or value as Baltimore City Historic Districts or Landmarks, thereby necessitating their preservation and protection. In making its recommendation, the Commission shall give appropriate consideration to the following standards. In reaching its decision, the Commission shall clearly state which standards have been applied.

A Baltimore City Landmark may be a site, structure, landscape, building (or portion thereof), place, work of art, or other object which:

1. dates from a particular period having a significant character, interest, or value, as part of the development, heritage, or culture of the City of Baltimore; or
2. is associated with the life of an outstanding historical person or persons; or
3. is the site of an historic event with a significant effect upon the cultural, political, economic, social, or historic heritage of the City of Baltimore; or
4. is significant of the architectural period in which it was built and has distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, method of construction, or engineering, or is the notable work of a master builder, designer, engineer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age; or
5. contributes information of historical, cultural, or social importance relating to the heritage of the community; or
6. has yielded, or may be likely to yield, archeological information important in history or prehistory.

### **Staff Recommendation: Approval**

Riverside Park meets CHAP's standards for landmark designation one, three, and five:

1. Riverside Park area played an important role in the Battle of Baltimore during the War of 1812. To commemorate this area's role, the City purchased three acres in 1862 and named the area Battery Square. In 1873, the city added approximately 14 acres to Battery Square and renamed it Riverside Park. Since this time, the park has provided passive and recreational opportunities to South Baltimoreans;
3. This site is associated with the Battle of Baltimore during the War of 1812, where Fort Lookout helped prevent the landing of 1,250 British soldiers on the south side of the peninsula, near today's Port Covington.

5. Many of the park components such as the pavilion, cannon memorial, entrances from Randall Street, and path system illustrate many Victorian landscape design features of park design.



Figure 1. Baltimore City, 1851. The rectangle shows the approximate location of Riverside Park

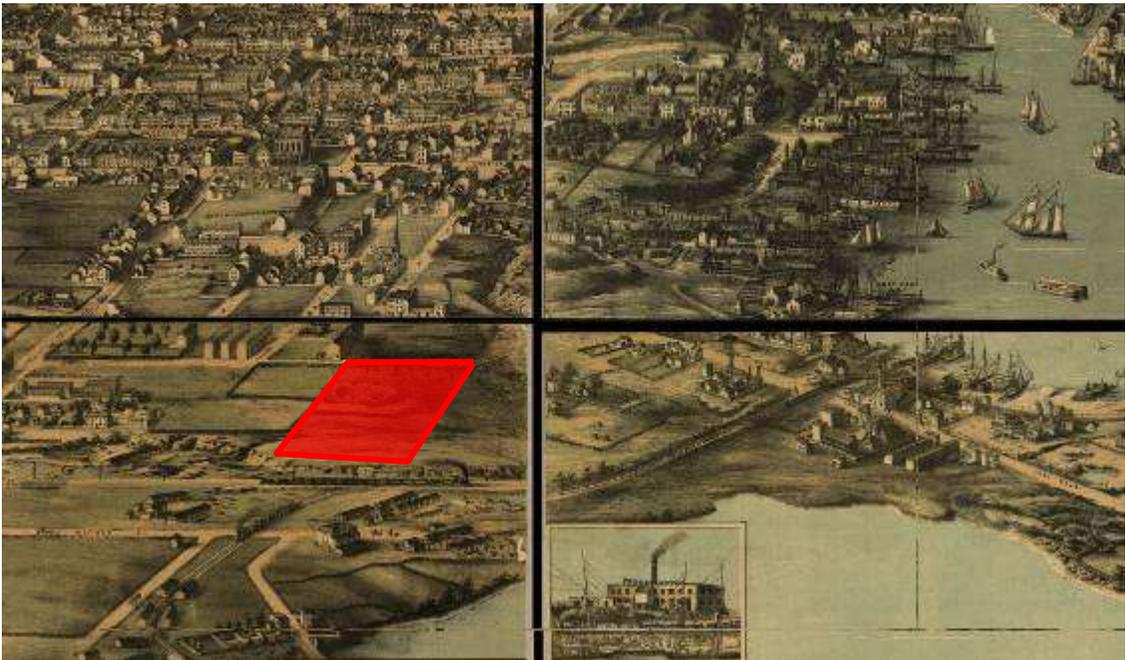


Figure 2. Sachse's Bird's Eye View of Baltimore, 1869. The rectangle shows the approximate location of Riverside Park.

**Park Description:**

Approximately 17 acres, Riverside Park abuts railroad tracks and I-95 highway on the south and streets lined with late 19<sup>th</sup>-century rowhouses on the east, north and west. The park comprises an active recreation area and a passive area. The southern half of the park features baseball diamonds, basketballs courts, football and soccer fields, a play ground and a large swimming pool. The passive area still retains its entrance ways, an historic pavilion, and a cannon memorial. The park is tied together by a pathway system that resembles the original Victorian design.

The following park components contribute to the overall historic character of the park:

- Randall Street entrances;
- Park Pavilion;
- Flagpole;
- Cannon Memorial;
- Pathway system and topography;
- The organization of passive and active recreation areas into upper and lower portions of the park; and
- Original shape.

There are two park structures, the pool house and the athletic field house, that are part of the history of Riverside Park; nevertheless, both buildings suffer tremendous physical integrity issues.

Semicircular in shape, the pool house, which opened in 1925, comprises three sections: the central section and two wings. The Pool house's current footprint has not changed. The central portion of the building, however, has been completely renovated. EIFS (a stucco-sprayed styrofoam material) wraps the façade of this section, enclosing window and door openings and most likely rearranging the composition of the facade. The cornice molding, doors, and roof material have been replaced. The interior has been completely renovated, and all historic features have been removed. On the wings of the building, windows and doors were removed and their openings were enclosed. In other areas new door and door openings have been installed. Numerous stucco patching and repainting repairs have diminished the original facades, and significant deterioration exists throughout the wings of the building.

The athletic field house, located southwest of the pool complex and directly north of the baseball field, has also lost significant historic integrity. The porch floor, posts, and ceiling trim are all new materials. Doors, windows, door and window openings have all been compromised. Red plywood has replaced the original side gable sheathing materials. On the west façade, a severely deteriorated bas-relief of children playing baseball is located on the chimney.

In addition, the maintenance building, located in the southeast corner of the park, is not historic.



**Figure 3. Aerial view of pool house, 2006.**



**Figure 4. Athletic Fieldhouse, 2007.**



**Figure 5 and 6. Bas-relief located on west façade of the athletic field house (left); and maintenance shop (right).**

## History

The Riverside Park area became strategically important in the Battle of Baltimore during the War of 1812. Captain Samuel Babcock built a circular battery here called Fort Lookout. During the night of September 13, 1812, when Fort McHenry was being bombarded, more than a thousand British soldiers mostly in barges slipped past the south side of Fort McHenry in an effort to capture Fort McHenry by land. Fort Lookout, commanded by Lt. George Budd, along with the garrisons at Forts Covington and Babcock repelled a British attempt to assault the peninsula by land. After the War, the fort was renamed Fort Wood in honor of Captain Eleazer Wood. To commemorate this defense, City of Baltimore purchased three acres in 1862 to create Battery Square.

In 1873, the City purchased another fourteen acres and renamed the area Riverside Park for its “commanding view of the Patapsco River and bridges to Ann Arundel County and the sweep of water rounding the neck of land that terminates in the military sea wall enclosing Fort McHenry.” In 1881, the park featured a large marble fountain that contained gold fish and other species. Four drinking fountains and two pavilions were placed throughout the park. An on-site nursery raised plants and flowers for seasonal flower arrangements, and numerous trees provided shade. A wrought iron fence enclosed the park, and driveways and walks looped around the park, providing views to the west, south and east.



Figures 6 and 7. 1896 map of Riverside Park (left); and aerial view of Riverside Park 2006 (right).

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Baltimore experienced a shift in recreation from passively enjoying bucolic scenes to physical activity. Active recreation became a priority. The Children's Playground Association of Baltimore officially operated many of the playgrounds in Baltimore, including Riverside Park's playground, which in 1904 averaged 400-600 children daily.

Park officials wrestled with introducing active recreation facilities in Riverside Park while keeping its historic area and passive activities intact. They settled on preserving the upper portion of Riverside Park, the original Battery Square area, as a 'passive' area of the park. In 1906 possibly in anticipation of the Centennial of the Battle of Baltimore, the Society of the War of 1812 erected a cannon memorial. Its inscription stated "These cannons were used in the defense of Baltimore against the invasion by the British 1812-1814."

In the lower portion of the park, they erected a playground, basketball courts, tennis courts, and an outdoor gymnasium. As many as 1,000 people visited the park during peak season. In the early 1920s, park officials replaced the fountain with the swimming pool. Completed in 1925, the swimming pool added another crucial activity for the South Baltimore residents. Replacing gold fish with boys and girls concretely represents the change from passive to active activities. Today, the park preserves this relationship between passive and active recreation areas of the park. As active recreation has continually evolved throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, much of the original structures and fields have been greatly altered. Nonetheless, the upper portion of the park has been well preserved.



Figure 8. Hughes photograph of Riverside Park ca. 1920s.



Figure 9. Postcard of Riverside Park, from Baltimore City Recreation and Parks.

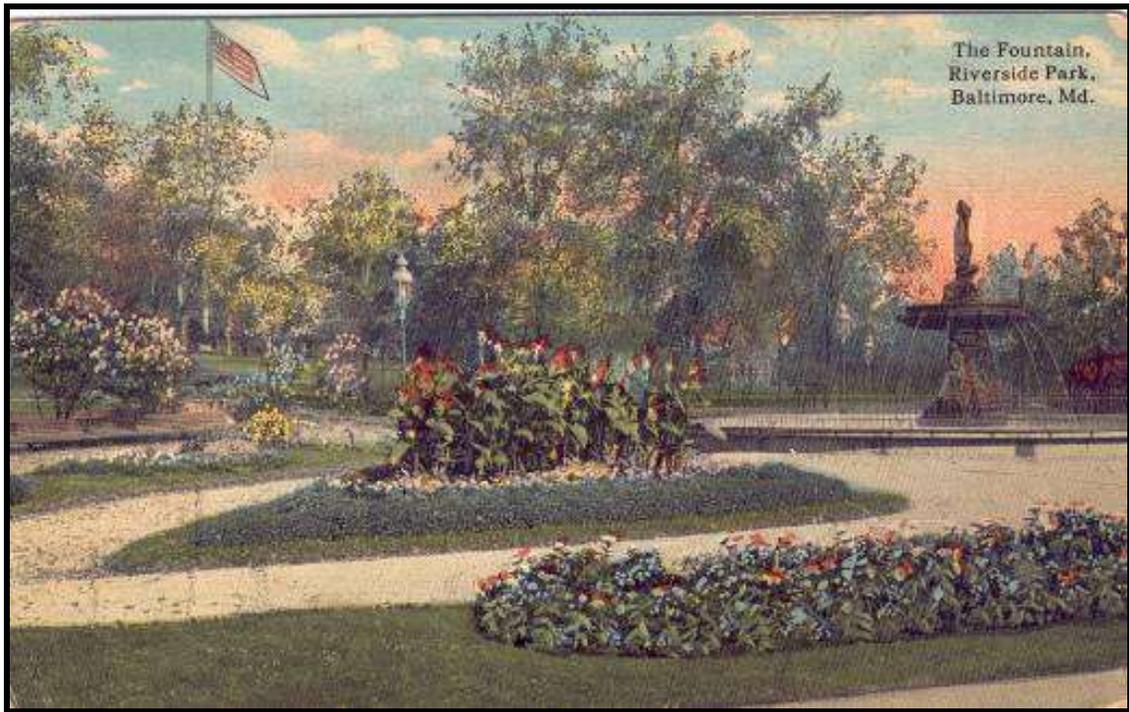


Figure 10. Postcard of the original fountain in Riverside Park. This view is looking north towards the flagpole.